

**Dartmouth Natural Resources Trust (DNRT)
White-tailed Deer Management Program
Program Overview and Rules and Regulations**

**Approved by LMC June 5, 2024
Approved by Board of Directors June 19, 2024**

DNRT History

DNRT is the non-profit land trust located in the town of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, founded in 1971 with a mission to preserve and protect Dartmouth's natural resources for people and nature, forever. The organization has helped to protect more than 5,600 acres within Dartmouth, including nearly 1,970 acres owned and stewarded by the organization. These open space reserves provide Dartmouth residents and other visitors with more than 41 miles of trails for hiking, biking, dog walking, and the enjoyment of nature.

In its more than 50 years of protecting Dartmouth's incredible scenic, historic, agricultural, and natural resources, DNRT has grown from an all-volunteer land trust to having five full-time staff – including two land management staffers – and two seasonal employees. The organization's membership currently stands at 1,400 members, with more than 200 active volunteers.

Prior to 2024, DNRT did not permit hunting of any kind on its properties. While DNRT's staff has always recognized the value of hunting as a wildlife management tool, we have also always upheld the organizational rules established by our founders. After five decades, the public also has become accustomed to being able to hike DNRT trails and walk their dogs largely without concerns about encountering active hunters. For these reasons and others, including our rule permitting off-leash dogs, DNRT has previously prohibited hunting on all of its fee-owned nature reserves. Exceptions to this have been DNRT Reserves that include Town-owned land where hunting is permitted, including the Frank Knowles/Little River Reserve, Star of the Sea, and Destruction Brook Woods. At these three properties, the overall Reserve is made up of both DNRT-owned parcels and Town-owned parcels. Because the Town permits hunting on their lands, visitors to these Reserves may encounter hunters and hunting activities on the Town-owned portions of the Reserve, even though hunting is prohibited on the DNRT-owned parcels.

Program Purpose

According to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), in recent years native white-tailed deer populations throughout much of eastern Massachusetts, and Dartmouth in particular, have grown so rapidly that deer are now overabundant in the region. MassWildlife biologists estimate that deer populations in southern Bristol County far exceed the ideal 12-18 deer per square mile density. This overabundance is a direct effect of human influence that has eliminated natural predators such as wolves and mountain lions, and created ideal deer habitat through suburban development. Additionally, despite steady increases in the number of deer harvested each year statewide, there are fewer hunters on the landscape now than in previous generations, and those hunters have increasingly diminished access to hunting land. As time goes on there are more deer and fewer sources of population control. In recognition of this problem, the Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Board has instated policies designed to incentivize hunters to harvest more deer.

The resulting explosion in the deer population has substantial consequences for both our natural and cultural landscapes. One of the most significant impacts from overabundant deer is excessive vegetation browse. Excess browse poses a considerable threat to Dartmouth's natural landscape and DNRT's Reserves in particular, by reducing overall biodiversity, increasing the presence and dominance of invasive species, suppressing the re-generation of native forest, and reducing the success and survival of rare

species. The damage caused by excessive deer browse exacerbates the negative impacts of climate change by reducing the overall resiliency of our natural ecosystems. Overabundant deer populations also have negative impacts on Dartmouth's cultural landscape, including the destruction of large quantities of agricultural and horticultural crops, and residential plantings.

In addition to causing damage from overbrowsing, high deer populations contribute to hundreds of automobile crashes in Massachusetts every year. The Southcoast continually leads the State with high annual numbers of deer crashes. MassWildlife estimates that nearly 1 in 115 drivers in Massachusetts experiences a deer collision each year. These crashes cause both economic and physical harm to members of the community.

DNRT is concerned about the impacts of the local deer population on the properties we steward, as well as those of the greater Dartmouth community. We are also concerned about the impacts to the economic livelihood of farmers and others in the community, and the safety of the town's residents. In order to begin to address these concerns we conducted a thorough review of deer management options, including reviewing published scientific research, and speaking with state agencies, private landowners, and other conservation organizations to learn about different options and perspectives.

We have concluded that opening some of our Reserves to controlled hunting is the only practical and effective means to help control the deer population in Dartmouth. In support of that finding, we have developed a limited and carefully controlled white-tailed Deer Management Program to help reduce the deer population and the corresponding damage to Dartmouth's natural, agricultural, and cultural resources. The program is designed so that hikers on our properties with trails can continue to enjoy the same level of comfort they always have during their visits, but allows DNRT to begin to address the consequences of an overabundant deer population. The program is intentionally small to start so that DNRT can determine what works best for our organization and if appropriate and merited, potentially grow the program from there.

General Program Scope:

- The program is a Deer Management Program only, *not* a hunting program. The program does not permit or sanction the hunting of any other species on DNRT Reserves.
- Day-to-day operations of all of DNRT's Reserves, including those where hunting is permitted, are managed by DNRT's Land Manager, Linda Vanderveer. DNRT's Deer Management program is coordinated by Ken Correia. The Deer Management Coordinator reports to the Land Manager and is required to get approval from the Land Manager on any proposed changes to the program rules and guidelines. The Deer Management Coordinator is also responsible for reporting weekly and seasonal program results to the Land Manager, and communicating with the program hunters.
- The progress and success of the program will be reviewed on an annual basis. The program is intended to support DNRT's habitat and agricultural management goals and may be adjusted or discontinued at any time for any reason, including successful attainment of the program goals. Each hunter involved in the program will be interviewed and approved by DNRT staff and the Deer Management Coordinator, and is specifically invited to participate in the program. Permission to participate can be rescinded by DNRT at any time.
- Hunting one season does not guarantee an invitation to hunt the following year.
- Each participant must be licensed to hunt in Massachusetts and consent to a CORI/SORI background review and a proficiency test.
- The number of hunters per Reserve will be decided by the Deer Management Coordinator and approved by the Land Manager, and will be based on available acreage and proximity of roads and residential structures.
- The program is designed to be safe, effective, and have as little impact on Reserve operations as possible.

Hunting is limited to Reserves without blazed trails, and only in areas designated acceptable according to state law and DNRT judgement. As a result, space in the program is currently very limited.

- DNRT's deer management program is limited to archery, and all activities are to be conducted in accordance with current state law as well as DNRT's specific rules and regulations, listed below. The use of crossbows will be allowed by those holding a valid MA crossbow permit.
- While we will inform the public of the program, the intention is that visitors to our properties will never encounter any sign of the operation.
- The Deer Management Coordinator will submit a report at the end of the season that includes number of deer harvested, sex, approximate age of the harvests, hunter effort, interactions with members of the public, and any other noteworthy items.

General Program Rules:

- All Massachusetts game laws and hunting regulations must be observed, including required poundage on bows, blaze orange requirements, seasonal restrictions, and bag limits. Hunters who fail to follow state hunting regulations or rules or any DNRT policies will be prohibited from hunting DNRT property effective immediately. Rules may be modified during the season and any changes will be communicated from DNRT's Land Manager to the Deer Management Coordinator, who will then inform hunters.
- All hunters will follow all instructions of the Deer Management Coordinator.
- Program participation is limited to the individual applicants, is not transferable, and is not extended to guests or relatives of the hunters. Vehicle ID tags are non-transferable.
- All hunting will take place within areas designated on property maps supplied by DNRT to the Deer Management Coordinator, and in locations approved by the Coordinator in collaboration with DNRT's Land Manager.
- Hunters must park only at designated locations and use designated access routes.
- Hunters must have a fall-arrest system attached to their body at all times while in a tree stand. Tree stands must be placed beyond all required setbacks from roads and structures. Use of "screw-in" style steps is not permitted. Hunters are permitted two fixed tree stands plus a temporary stand. Each tree stand location must be approved by the Deer Management Coordinator and shared with the Land Manager. Tree stands must be removed from the property by February 1.
- The use or possession of illegal drugs, marijuana, or alcohol is prohibited on the property.

Requirements & Expectations of Program Hunters

- All prospective hunters must pass a CORI/SORI background check and pass a one-time proficiency test prior to receiving an invitation from DNRT to participate in the program.
- All hunters must provide contact information, vehicle information, and a copy of their Massachusetts hunting license to both the Land Manager and the Deer Management Coordinator prior to participating in the program.

- Each participant must provide evidence of a Homeowner's or Renters Insurance policy from an insurance company or its agent, specifically an HO3, HO4 or HO6 policy declaration page which indicates a personal injury protection minimum limit of liability amount of \$500,000 per occurrence.
- Invited hunters must take part in an orientation meeting with the Land Manager and the Deer Management Coordinator prior to participating in the program. Throughout the season hunters will communicate regularly with the Deer Management Coordinator, adhere to procedures listed below, and adjust practices as directed by the Deer Management Coordinator.
- Hunters will be good stewards of the land and representatives of the program. They will maintain a friendly and non-confrontational manner with DNRT staff, members, and any members of the general public they encounter on the land. In the event that a visitor is encountered, the participant will alert the visitor to their presence, and get down from their deer stand to have a conversation. The participant should volunteer to produce the letter of permission, signed by DNRT staff. Any further contact or questions shall be directed to DNRT's Land Manager.
- Hunters will not comment publicly about the program to media, on social media, or online forums. If approached by a member of the media, hunters may confirm their participation in the program. All further questions shall be directed to the Land Manager.
- Each hunter will be expected to harvest at least two deer on the property to support the program goal of reducing deer density. As the removal of female deer contributes most directly to overall population reduction, taking females is preferred. No females shall be passed on if the hunter has an ethical shot. Harvests shall be confirmed by a photograph of the participant with the harvested deer.
- As the desired goal of DNRT's deer management program is to reduce the size of the deer population in Dartmouth, hunters should be prepared to continue hunting throughout the state-regulated season even if their personal hunting goals have been met. In support of that effort, DNRT strongly encourages hunters to participate in Mass Wildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest Program, which provides the opportunity to donate venison to those in need. More information on this program can be found at:
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masswildlifes-hunters-share-the-harvest-program>
- For every week that a participant is actively hunting on DNRT land, the participant will inform the Deer Management Coordinator of the number of deer taken and their sex, time spent in the field, sightings on the property, human encounters, and any noteworthy observations. Non-harvest information will be reported regardless of success. Failure to provide this information in a timely fashion will result in removal of the hunter from the program.

Pre-Season Procedures

- Each hunter will complete the program application annually.
- New hunters must pass a CORI/SORI background check and a proficiency test. The proficiency test is conducted by the Deer Management Coordinator and consists of clustering three out of five arrows in a target from 20 yards away. Prospective hunters will have two opportunities to meet the standard.
- Upon successful completion of orientation, the proficiency test, and the CORI/SORI, new hunters will be issued a program packet with: a property map, a letter of permission, FAQ sheets to distribute to others encountered on the property, two tree-stand tags, labels to affix to two trail cameras, and a vehicle placard identifying it as belonging to a program participant. Returning hunters will be issued a new program packet, tags, labels, and vehicle placard every year.

- The Deer Management Coordinator will work with the DNRT Land Manager to identify acceptable parking spots and confirm these locations with the hunters prior to the opening of the season. Any proposed modifications made to a parking arrangement must be approved by the DNRT Land Manager.
- Trail cameras used for scouting may be placed within the property starting July 1 of any given year.
- The Coordinator will approve the location of all tree stands in order to ensure safety, evaluate for potential harm to the tree, and confirm that the location meets all required setbacks, is discrete and not visible from trails or houses, and is marked on the master map to be shared with the Land Manager.
- Hunters may place up to two fixed tree stands on the property in approved locations following the first Saturday after Labor Day and will affix a tree stand tag to each.
- Hunters will be very conservative with any pruning for the siting of tree stands and shooting lanes. No branches or limbs over 3 inches will be downed or removed without prior consent from the Land Manager. Pruning may take place following the first Saturday after Labor Day following approval from the Deer Management Coordinator.
- Pre-season baiting is not permitted.

Procedures During Season

- Hunters will notify the Deer Management Coordinator on a weekly basis when they will be hunting the property and at which tree stand.
- The vehicle placard identifying holders to DNRT staff and local law enforcement as a program participant must be placed on the dashboard of the hunter's vehicle when the hunter is on DNRT property to hunt or prepare for hunting.
- Hunters will carry their letter of permission and property map with them at all times while on the property. The letter of permission will be presented to any DNRT staff member or visitor upon request.
- Although interactions with the public are anticipated to be minimal, hunters will be courteous to all property users and make a genuine effort to inform others about the purpose of the hunting program when encountered. The hunter will notify the Deer Management Coordinator and Land Manager of any negative encounters with visitors as soon as possible.
- If a climbing (temporary) stand is used in addition to stationary stands, this stand will be with the hunter at all times.
- Hunters will make every effort to avoid encountering other users when field dressing or removing deer from the property. Hunters will remove harvested deer as cleanly and expeditiously as possible, with utmost care and discretion for other property users. The deer shall be gutted in the woods and the cavity drained of blood before dragging. Entrails or large blood pools remaining from field dressing will be covered with snow, leaves, or brush. In the winter, no blood shall be left in the snow on trails. Removal of a deer with a game cart or jet-sled is preferred.
- Vehicles are not permitted on the property beyond being parked in designated areas. Should a hunter need assistance in recovering a deer from a remote location, including possibly with a vehicle, please notify the Deer Management Coordinator.
- Hunters must look for unrecovered injured deer and inform the Deer Management Coordinator as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours of the injury.
- If a wounded deer is not recovered and travels toward a busy road, the Deer Management Coordinator and appropriate authorities will be notified immediately.
- Hunters will not take photos with their animals in areas that see high public traffic or are easily visible. There shall be no landmark anywhere in the photo that would make the location identifiable as being on the Reserve. Hunters will not identify the hunting location in any online or social media posts.

- Upon killing a deer, the hunter will report to the Deer Management Coordinator within 24 hours details on the sex of deer (buck, doe or biological buck – a buck whose antlers are less than 3 inches and thus shall be tagged as a doe), approximate age, and stand site of the kill. The hunter will also provide the weekly update on time spent in the field, sightings on the property, human encounters, and any noteworthy observations/
- No plastic flagging tape will be used to mark trails or to follow a wounded deer. Glow tacks may be used to mark trails to stands (these must be removed at the end of the season). Only biodegradable material such as toilet paper may be used to follow a wounded deer.
- Hunter will notify the Deer Management Coordinator of any suspicious activity such as scouting or hunting by anybody not approved to participate, or a deer stand that does not belong to a program participant. If an unknown hunter is encountered, the hunter shall ask to see their permission letter. If they can't provide one, the hunter shall politely inform them that hunting is by permission only. If they refuse to leave or become combative, the hunter shall walk away and call the Environmental Police and the Coordinator immediately. Any vandalism or tampering with hunting gear shall be reported to the Coordinator immediately.
- Hunters will remove fixed tree stands by February 1 unless accommodations are approved by DNRT staff.

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DNRT wishes to thank Mass Audubon and the Trustees of Reservations for their assistance in developing this document.